



THE NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Reviewing Stand

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Illinois U Library What Should Children Read?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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THE REVIEWING STAND is a weekly radio forum presented by Northwestern University. The program was first broadcast by Station WGN, Chicago, October 14, 1934. It has been on the air continuously since that time, originating in the WGN studios, and, since 1935, carried by stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System. THE REVIEWING STAND presents members of the Northwestern University faculty and distinguished guests from business, government, education, and the press in round table discussions of contemporary problems—the questions that are in the news. The program is under the direction of James H. McBurney, Dean of the School of Speech, Northwestern University, and Miss Myrtle Stahl, Director of Educational Programs, WGN, Chicago.

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What Should Children Read?

MR. MCBURNEY: We are very proud and delighted to have with us as our special guest this morning Mr. Leo K. Bishop, Vice-President of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, who has an award to present to our program. Accepting the award will be Miss Myrtle Stahl, our producer and Educational Director for WGN, Chicago. Now may I present Mr. Bishop.

MR. BISHOP: Millions of people recognize the Reviewing Stand as the 20th Century counterpart of the old Town Meeting. Because of your contributions to democratic discussion, your willingness to face the most controversial issues of the day and because you bring to the Reviewing Stand the best minds — Protestant, Catholic and Jew — Negro and White — Oriental and Occidental — the National Conference of Christians and Jews has selected the Reviewing Stand and the Mutual Broadcasting System for its 1952 Brotherhood Week Award to a single network radio broadcast.

Citation for Reviewing Stand

We were keenly interested in your program of December 2nd in which you brought priest, rabbi, and minister to your microphone to discuss "Should More People Read the Bible?" These three dynamic religious groups brought to America its spiritual heritage. Through this particular program and through the year-round broadcast of the Reviewing Stand, you give recognition to this spiritual heritage as an important factor in modern living. You bring to bear the concern, philosophy and insight of our religious leaders on the vital issues of the day.

The National Conference of Christians and Jews takes pride at this Brotherhood Week period in awarding you this citation for outstanding contribution to mutual understanding and respect among people of diverse back-

grounds through the powerful medium of radio.

MISS STAHL: Thank you, Mr. Bishop. On behalf of WGN, the Mutual Broadcasting System, and the staff of the Reviewing Stand, it gives me great pleasure to express our appreciation to you and to the National Conference of Christians and Jews for presenting us with this award.

MR. MCBURNEY: On behalf of Northwestern University, I, too, should like to tell Mr. Bishop we are most appreciative of the award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

Today, the Reviewing Stand asks, "What Should Children Read?" Our speakers are Mrs. Margaret Friskey, Editor, Children's Press, Chicago; Mrs. Dilla MacBean, Director, Division of Libraries, Chicago Public Schools; Mr. Leverett S. Gleason of the Lev Gleason Publications, Inc., New York City; and Paul A. Witty, Professor of Education, School of Education, Northwestern University.

What should children read? Professor Witty, why does it make any difference whether children read or not?

'No Substitute'

MR. WITTY: I think McBurney, that there is no substitute for reading in the lives of boys and girls. I think it is the most important, single force in education, and I think too, it is one of the greatest avocational or leisure activities that we have.

MRS. FRISKEY: It is important that children read because it is in the early years that the habits are formed that they are going to carry on all their lives.

MRS. MacBEAN: Reading enriches their lives; they learn vicariously about the world and things and people; and through these enriching experiences, we feel the whole child is developed, which after all, in the educational world, is our main objective and obligation.

MR. McBURNEY: Does it make any difference what children read, so long as they read, Mr. Gleason?

MR. GLEASON: Of course it makes a difference! I would rather a child read almost anything than that he should not read at all because I think reading and writing are an important means of communication. An illiterate person or semi-illiterate person is at an enormous disadvantage. It is important they should learn to read easily.

MRS. FRISKEY: There is a time when a child will read the laundry list and every road sign and get pleasure from it because it is a new experience. In books, it is something that happens in the child's mind. And what happens is determined to a considerable extent by the ideas in the book. What children read is important!

MR. McBURNEY: Do you have some concern about what they read, Mrs. MacBean?

Wealth of Material

MRS. MacBEAN: Very definitely. I feel there is a need to develop a love of reading and to guide the child in what he reads. We have a wealth of material in books today, suited to various abilities, grade levels, and on every subject under the sun, moon and stars, to meet his needs and to fill his interest.

MRS. FRISKEY: There is no whole education without books since we gave up the old tribal songs. It is the way we can tap the mind of all the ages.

MR. McBURNEY: Who is to say what children are to read, Witty, and how should this "censorship," forgive me for using that term, be exercised?

MR. WITTY: McBurney, there is a concept generally held in education that education is a process that seeks the greatest development of every boy and girl in accord with his unique nature and his needs. If this be true, all our agencies of education should be used in a developmental way and books should serve then, to help youngsters understand themselves better, to understand their social en-

vironment better. Books provide, perhaps, the most satisfying and desirable method of escape. It is therefore, in a developmental concept that we seek an answer to this question, "What is good for boys and girls?" Books are good for them if they serve their needs and help advance them toward the goal of an adequate kind of maturity.

MR. GLEASON: I think it is very important that we take up this question for a moment as to who should say what children ought to read, and perhaps I may shock some of you educators, but I think it might be a good thing to let the children decide. They know what they like. You can trust their judgment and discrimination.

MR. McBURNEY: Would you extend that to their eating habits?

MR. GLEASON: Yes. I don't think it is best to make kids eat something they don't like.

MR. McBURNEY: Not even spinach?

MR. GLEASON: Not even spinach.

Guidance

MRS. MacBEAN: You would allow them to eat candy and ice cream and starches because that is what they like? A child has to be guided as to what he eats and his habits in the home as well as in the street and his community.

MRS. FRISKEY: It is not so much a question of censorship of books, I think, as it is knowing what is available in a wide way. Parents must know books and know the child.

MR. WITTY: Children need guidance in what they read just as they have to have guidance in other aspects of growth. That means, of course, if a child comes into our Reading Clinic, as a good many do, and reads nothing but comic books, we want to start there to lift him to higher levels. We believe there are levels of development and growth.

MR. GLEASON: I certainly agree with guidance, whether it has to do with reading or spinach. Guidance and censorship are two different things.

MRS. FRISKEY: Censorship, it seems to me, lies in the hands of the publisher who should inform himself, and be in line with that which the educators have found helps the child most in his full development.

MR. McBURNEY: Does it make any difference how children read, so long as they do read?

MR. WITTY: McBurney, I think we must afford opportunities for youngsters to enjoy the process of reading, the act of reading, and the results, if they are going to educate themselves through reading, and lift themselves gradually through reading. This means we must regard reading as a meaningful thing associated with interests and needs. It means that we have to give attention to reading in the subject fields; it means we must provide a balanced reading program; and it means also that we have to give intelligent guidance through home and school in order that children will lift themselves to higher and higher levels of taste and understanding.

MR. McBURNEY: You took exception to my word "censorship." What kind of censorship are you afraid of, Gleason?

Censorship

MR. GLEASON: I am afraid of state censorship and censorship by local government. I am afraid of censorship of all kinds! You would be interested to know, and maybe you might be frightened, that two years ago, 42 states introduced legislation to censor comic magazines. When you censor comic magazines, you have to censor your books too, and censor everything. I think such guidance belongs in the classroom and in the home and not in a state.

MR. McBURNEY: Anyone take exception to that?

MRS. MacBEAN: I do. There must have been some reason for those books being censored. We have to evaluate everything we use in the classroom and what we use in the libraries. There are lots and lots of books coming off the presses that we

do not accept. They are mediocre. We try to select the best there is for children, and this doesn't mean they are stuffy or over their heads. A child will never read a book that is too hard for him to read, and the amazing thing is that the publishers have given us the right books for the slow reader. We have them beautifully illustrated, graded as to ease of reading, and designed to contribute to this development of the whole child.

MR. WITTY: I want to make two points about the comic books. There is an alarmingly large number of comic books sold every year. . . .

MR. McBURNEY: 900,000,000 a year.

Comic Books

MR. WITTY: Astonishing! For every book, including textbooks and the Bible, there are then at least two of these books published and sold. Now, if one examines a fair assortment of these, he will discover that many of them present our world in a kind of Fascist setting of violence and hate and destruction. I think it is bad for children to get that kind of recurring diet; and a second thing, you could read carloads of comic books and not be lifted because comic books tend to keep people on a plateau.

MR. McBURNEY: Let's take a look at the reading habits of our children. Mrs. MacBean, are children reading more today?

MRS. MacBEAN: I feel they are. This is the conclusion of a study that has been carried on by the American Library Association and published in their bulletin. They made a survey of 42 public libraries from 1939 to the present time, from the West Coast to the East Coast, north to south, large cities and small ones. They began with the index figure in 1939, feeling that that was a good basic year to begin. There is some fluctuation, but a general downward trend in adult reading. The reverse is true in children's reading. In 1939, 33% of the total circulation of the libraries surveyed was children's books, and in 1951, the circulation of children's books was 44% of the total. I know that even in our Chicago public

schools we circulated a million and a half books in a little less than 200 elementary school libraries and doubled the figure of about five or six years ago. We do feel there is more reading.

MR. WITTY: I think there is an important point, too, McBurney, in the increase of the sale of children's books. This and the wider use of them is due to the fine work that the public schools and libraries are doing in getting books into the classroom, and getting children interested in them. This should be noted, however: the surveys continued to show that the amount of voluntary reading is increasing up to ages 12 and 13, and then there is a drop. Surveys show too, there are probably 25,000,000 American adults who do not have available public libraries. There is a great need for doing something to improve the level of reading, to create opportunities for better kinds of reading among adults. The process must start with children, but we must work on adult education too.

Circulation Increase

MR. McBURNEY: I take it that the circulation of children's books has stepped up considerably from 33% of the total circulation to something in the 40's — 44%. Then Mr. Witty reports that it drops off precipitously when the youngster achieves the ripe, old age of 13. How do you account for that?

MRS. MacBEAN: Life in the high school is much more complex. By the time the boy or girl gets into the high school, his day is very crowded and very full. I think there is a wide variation, too, in the way the reading materials are presented to him. Perhaps I shouldn't be speaking against the high schools to that extent, but there is more required reading, as we call it. High school students are more likely to be occupied with textbooks and assigned reading rather than general, recreational reading.

MR. WITTY: Formal reading instruction usually stops in the sixth grade. If you look at the distribution of reading ability for high school people, you

will find with the kind of people we now have in modern high schools, many of them need to have reading programs continued certainly throughout the junior high school. There is a need for developmental reading programs, and there is a great need in the high school. This means, then, what we ought to do is to conceive of reading as a continuous process with guidance and direction of reading in accord with these needs that we have mentioned, like understanding one's social environment, and reading for the joy of it. That type of program should continue throughout the high school.

MR. McBURNEY: With 900,000,000 comic books circulated every year, Mr. Gleason might argue that this enormous circulation is a factor causing the general increase in children's reading.

Influence on Reading

MR. GLEASON: I would like to emphasize that point. It seems apparent to me with the enormous growth of comic magazines and at the same time, enormous growth of children's books, there is possibly some connection between the two. I believe this. If you want people to read books, they must know how to read easily and have some love for reading, and I say that the comic magazines have stimulated that. I can give you a good example here in Chicago at the Holy Name School; they have been making an experiment with one of my magazines, "Uncle Charlie's Fables." The experiment is three months under way and I am told they have noticed a considerable increase in the desire to read and in speed of reading. That is quite unusual, I think. They have found in their classes a new desire to recreate scenes which have excited or interested them in the magazine.

MR. WITTY: Mr. Gleason, yes, you can stimulate reading through comics, but you will get more reading of comics. You will get people performing on a level that is not in accord with our hopes in education.

MRS. MacBEAN: With the books that are available in our schools today and

our new trend in education to organize the curriculum around units of work with many, many books, we are going to find by say 20 years from now, a better and a larger reading public than we have today.

MRS. FRISKEY: I think it is up to the publishers to see that the books they are putting out to children have enough appeal to raise the child off of the plateau to which Mr. Witty refers. It isn't the comic books that are disturbing me so much, but I think they need the great variety provided by other material so they can go on beyond the comic books.

MR. WITTY: In order for children to go on, they must have guidance to lift them; there are two groups of people involved in giving guidance; one, teachers, and the other, parents. We will start for instance with the comics. We will try to lead children on to beautifully illustrated books, some of the *You* books where the cartoon technique is used. Children love excitement and adventure and the types of things some good books give them, such as a *Story Parade*, *Adventure Book*, *Tonio and the Stranger*, and many, many others. Such reading materials satisfy the same appetites with something that will lead to greater gains for society and democracy generally.

'Uplifting Influence'

MR. McBURNEY: As an old-fashioned college professor, Mr. Gleason, I want to ask you a question which may be inflammatory in view of some of your interests: Is it too much to expect, after all, that the books that children read should contribute to understanding, judgment, and appreciation of human values; is it too much to expect that the books they read should be put up in an attractive format that will contribute to appreciation of the finer things in life and elevate their taste? Do these comic books that you see scattered around on the newsstands really do these things?

MR. GLEASON: Some do and some just have no effect whatever in that sense.

MR. McBURNEY: They have a negative effect, don't they?

MR. GLEASON: I wouldn't say so. The question of taste is a matter of taste, after all, and who is to say?

MR. WITTY: Education is a matter of learning *something* and having available the tools and the materials by which to learn. Carlyle once said, "All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been, is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books," and these are not comic books! Guidance and help and direction are needed if children are going to read the right kind of books.

MR. GLEASON: You understand, Mr. Witty, that I am in no way against reading of books. I would like to encourage it. I think our magazines do encourage it. Children, like adults, read primarily for entertainment.

'Not Only Entertainment'

MR. WITTY: I do not grant they necessarily read solely for entertainment. I have seen children read to find answers to problems in chemistry; I have seen them read with enjoyment, to understand themselves; I have seen them read to find out about other people. You need two things to get children to read. You need to know something about youngsters—their interests and their varied needs; and second, you need to make sure that the materials you give to them are readable. You ought to be concerned about what the materials do to youngsters!

MRS. FRISKEY: I think this basic love of books that we are trying to develop in children is associated with the make-up of the books. It can be translated into tactile terms, the way the book feels, the quality of the art work, and the book design as a three-dimensional thing from the relation of the cover to the title page and one page to another, and not just a page as a single plane. Some of the greatest artists in the country are working on these children's books, and many of them are beautiful enough to be included as part of our cultural heritage along with music and art.

MRS. MacBEAN: I feel that in a book, the primary thing we are looking for is the style, the beauty of words put together to tell a good story. And then we have these magnificent illustrations that complement that story. The child, as he turns from page to page, is enthralled with the beauty. That is something we are trying to develop in many ways, as well as satisfying his curiosity or satisfying his enjoyment in a good adventure story. Take Robert McCloskey's *Homer Price*, a good live story with lots of humor, and then another one that is a good example is Kate Seredy's *Goodmaster*, and the child gains something that contributes something that is lasting in his life.

MR. WITTY: Publishers are giving us excellent biographies, Janet Eaton's new book on George Washington, for example. There are so many fine books of poetry, and books on special subjects, and books on science and social studies. All these fine things are being made available at the present time through publishers, but we as teachers and parents have to give children guidance to introduce them to the treasures to be found in these books.

MRS. MacBEAN: There is a certain pattern in their interest. We find another thing that we need to develop in their lives is an imagination and after they learn to read their little folk tales, and fairy stories, they go on to legends and ballads. I think poetry is also very important.

Balanced Program

MR. WITTY: Mr. McBurney, there should be a balanced reading program which provides for the reading of children's magazines, newspapers, biographies, factual materials, and so on down the line. I have to put in one word for poetry. Coleridge once said, "Poetry is the best words in the best order." Therefore, I believe it is a very important part of a reading program.

MR. McBURNEY: Let me say a word about poetry. You have been speaking very eloquently about poetry and ballads and fine stories beautifully

illustrated. Are you describing books you like or books that children like?

MRS. MacBEAN: Oh, indeed, Mr. McBurney, just countless children enjoy them. There have been many, many studies made, and those are the favorites of the children. I refer to such authors as Howard Peace, Stephen Meader, Armstrong Sperry, Ingraham Foster.

MR. WITTY: Mrs. MacBean, we have talked to youngsters about poetry and they have become interested in it. One day when I was visiting a history class a youngster came up to me and said, "Mr. Witty, I want you to see this poem by Emily Dickinson:

"The pedigree of honey
Does not concern the bee;
A clover anytime, to him
Is aristocracy."

Children love poetry if they are introduced to it.

MRS. MacBEAN: Reading aloud and enjoying it together.

Interest in Poetry?

MR. McBURNEY: I think this youngster that showed you the poem a very unusual child. How many red-blooded little rascals are going to go for this poetry you are talking about in these fine books? Do you think they really do?

MRS. FRISKEY: Well, I haven't had too much experience except in reading aloud to my children. We had this comic book problem at one time and they devoured comic books. I think it is a phase they go through. I was looking around to find things to lead them on and one of the things I got for them was Alfred Noyes' "The Highwayman." That seemed to ring a bell. That is on adult level, but much of my own reading as a child was of that sort.

MR. McBURNEY: It does ring a bell, almost literally!

MR. GLEASON: I like poetry myself. I know children devour comic magazines. I cannot conceive of them devouring poetry, especially sold on the newsstands—I doubt it very much.

MRS. MacBEAN: Poetry is a part of their lives. I think poetry needs to be

shared, needs to be read aloud. If you get a good teacher and it is really thrilling to her, the children share in that enjoyment. I have heard Sandburg's poetry given in a choir, and the enjoyment those great, big boys had was thrilling to watch!

Children Write Verse

MR. WITTY: The clearest evidence, Mr. Gleason, that red-blooded boys, and all kinds of boys do like poetry is that they will write it. Hugh Mearns' great work in which he encouraged the boys at Lincoln School to write books of excellent poems every year is an example. Children love poetry. I would go further and say it is a natural part of the growth of children. We sometimes block it and do not direct it so they do not get satisfaction from it.

MRS. MacBEAN: In children's newspapers that you find in the schools, various poems are included and there will be a whole page of little poems they have written. Children get a lot of enjoyment out of writing poetry. They must, or you wouldn't find a whole page of it.

MR. WITTY: Through *Story Parade*, we encourage children to form clubs, the Penguin Clubs, and children contribute books of verse and they love writing poems. But they must have encouragement and guidance to do it.

MR. McBURNEY: I accept this exciting evidence, but it is a matter of record that some 900,000,000 comic

books are being sold every year. If you have a strong preference for other types of reading matter, and other types of reading habits, it would seem to me that you would have to do something to implement this preference.

MRS. FRISKEY: I think the publishers are trying to find books that will have the same appeal.

MR. WITTY: I think Mrs. Friskey, they are doing a wonderful job. The big job yet to be done is by parents and teachers in guiding the reading of the fine materials you are turning out so children will reap a balanced reading program, and will enjoy the process and the results of reading. Thus, they will continue to educate themselves all of their lives through reading.

MR. McBURNEY: I can't understand why Mr. Gleason doesn't separate the sheep from the goats in the comic books. Some of those comic books are on the lowest level, it seems to me, exploiting sex and sadistic practices—

MR. GLEASON: Really, I don't know of any comic book today that exploits sex—

MR. WITTY: I do.

MR. GLEASON: I would like to see it.

MR. WITTY: I'll bring you some of them.

ANNOUNCER: I am sorry ladies and gentlemen, but our time is up.





Suggested Reading

Compiled by William Huff,
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
Deering Library, Northwestern University.



ARBUTHNOT, MAY H. *Children and Books*. Chicago, Scott, Foresman, 1947.

A comprehensive survey of children's literature, giving reading interests, criteria for types of reading, and selections from many fine children's books for ages two to fifteen.

DUFF, ANNIS, *Bequest of Wings*. New York, Viking, 1944.

A description of the adventures in reading in every day living shared by a mother and father and their two children.

EATON, ANNE T. *Reading with Children*. New York, Viking, 1940.

A discussion of approximately 1000 children's books which will be of value to adults interested in this field; *Treasure for the Taking* (Viking, 1946) by the same author is a supplementary list.

HAZARD, PAUL. *Books, Children and Men*. Tr. by MARGUERITE MITCHELL. Boston, Horn Book, 1944.

A survey of the finest children's literature of other countries presented by a former professor of comparative literature both in the United States and France.

SAWYER, RUTH. *Way of the Storyteller*. New York, Viking, 1942.

An invigorating book drawn from the author's own experience in story telling and including a collection of selected stories from other countries.

WITTY, PAUL. *Reading in Modern Education*. Boston, Heath, 1949.

Of particular interest is the chapter entitled "The Role of Interest and Motive in the Reading Process."

Elementary English 28:194-200, 276-85, Apr.-My., '51. "Substitutes for the Comic Books." C. CARR.

Part I of this series deals with substitutes for "funny" comic books; Part II deals with substitutes for the "adventure" comic books. Titles, authors and publishers are given for these substitutes which are classified by level of school grade.

Elementary English 28:185-93, Apr. '51. "This Is Their World." R. TOOZE.

An analysis of children's reading needs if they are to be given an awareness of human relations and the dynamic world in which they live. Titles, authors and special groups of books are mentioned and their particular value pointed out.

Elementary English 28:194-200, Apr., '51. "Substitutes for the Comic Books." C. CARR.

An analytic classification and criticism of a group of children's illustrators and authors whose works might serve as constructive substitutes for comic books.

Elementary School Journal 51:427-35, Apr., '51. "Foundation Stones in the Road to Better Reading." W. S. GRAY.

A discussion centering around six "foundation stones" which if incorporated into a reading program may pave the way to a richer world of reading for the child.

Elementary School Journal 50:144-50, Nov., '49. "Study of Children's Recreational Reading." I. L. MAUCK and E. J. SWENSON.

Elementary school pupils favor fiction and will take advantage of supplementary reading materials although recreational reading ranks lower than radio-listening, sports and the movies.

Elementary School Journal 50:516-20, My., '50. "Family Life in Children's Literature." H. H. FISHER.

A study answering the question, "How does family life appear in children's literature?" and pointing out examples of democratic family life found in children's books.

Elementary School Journal 51:66-7, Oct., '50. "Comics Lend a Hand in Remedial Reading." N. EDWARDS.

Comics may serve to create an interest and desire to read provided they are used judiciously.

Journal of Education 134:13-14, Jan., '51. "Basic Question in Reading; What Is Your Purpose?" H. R. MILLER.

The method of reading is determined by the purpose, and these purposes vary with the individual and the situation.

National Parent-Teacher 46:24-6, Nov., '51. "Reading to Meet the Challenge of Our Day."

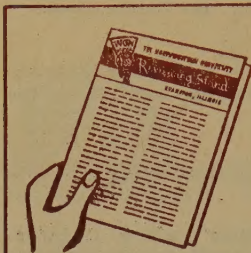
The reading of the biographies of great men and women opens new worlds of exploration for the child's mind, and illustrates factors in human relationships which make an individual rise or fall.

National Parent-Teacher 44:23-5, Je., '50. "Comic Corruption." R. RONSON.

Unless chosen carefully by conscientious parents, comics can serve to keep children from reading good literature and stunt the desire to pass beyond the comic book stage.

Understanding the Child 20:117-18, Oct., '51. "Do Our Children's Books Meet Emotional Needs?" H. N. COLM.

Children's books are not presenting a true and well-rounded picture of the world in which the child lives because the factor of realism is ignored.



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